

## **twenty minutes out by decinq**

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Richie imagines brushing his teeth before bed is like dragging his body across a finish line. A small victory. A pathetic one, but he thinks there's success in habit.

## twenty minutes out

### Author's Note:

what up, i love to make myself sad!!!!

all mistakes are my own.

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a door had been opened and could not be shut and then it was shut. i turned my back and felt the vacuum of my leaving.

i live in big spaces, so i'm left alone in big spaces (...) we invented a fence in the middle of the snow so we could meet at the fence and whisper.

clemency at the fence. is this your sadness? asks the trashman. no, that is a fishbone and that is a soup can and that over there is no longer recognizable. paint ghosts over everything, the sadness of everything.

- landscape with black coats in snow, richard siken

“So,” Richie says, palms sweating. He smiles, barely, tight lipped, there and gone. “A good friend of mine died a few months ago.”

“I mean, Jesus,” he starts. “I know California is fucked to hell, but what the fuck do I pay you \$250 an hour for if you can’t fix my shit?”

“It’s only been twenty-two minutes,” she looks up from her watch. “It’s our first session.” He sighs. “Rich,” she says, patient even though he wishes she wasn’t. “No one can make you feel better but yourself.”

Wrong, wrong, wrong. His brain - stuck on a loop. A needle in a groove, a record skipping. He knows what she means, in theory. But the reality of it just isn’t true. She’s wrong.

Eddie could.

Richie watches his own reflection in the mirror as he brushes his teeth. Bev, months ago, when Richie first called, had said, “I think all we can try to do is the little things.” Richie imagines brushing his teeth before bed is like dragging his body across a finish line. A small victory. A pathetic one, but he thinks there’s success in habit. Success in persistence.

The mirror is dirty. Not smudged, but slightly dusty. There’s spots of what look like old, dried toothpaste across. He closes his eyes and doesn’t think anything. Spits. Turns on the tap, runs his toothbrush

under the water. Puts it back in his mouth.

Richie watches his own reflection in the mirror, toothbrush hanging limply from the corner of his mouth. Bev, months ago, when Richie first called, had said, “What would Eddie want you to do?”

Richie had swallowed back a sob, unwilling to cry to her on the phone. “I don’t know,” he said. “Fuck, shit.”

He doesn’t know what Eddie would want him to do.

Richie walks in the front door of his apartment, tucks his keys back into his jeans. He can hear Eddie mumbling.

Richie follows his voice, down the hall and left, kitchen. When he turns the corner he says, “Jesus, Eds, get your fucking head out of the ov-”

But when Eddie pulls back and turns to face Richie, he’s not Eddie at all, It’s face on Eddie’s body, smiling wide. It laughs. Richie stumbles backwards, falling, scrambling. “Have the guts, Richie,” It says, stepping towards Richie, face morphing into something more like Eddie’s.

“You left me there.” Eddie’s voice.

“No,” Richie says. Closes his eyes.

“Let him go,” It says, all menace, no Eddie, and Richie wakes up.

“So,” Richie says, palms sweating. He smiles, barely, tight lipped, there and gone. “A good friend of mine died a few months ago.”

He closes the fingers of list left hand into a fist. Wants to cry. Keeps his eyes open. “It’s been, uh.” He shrugs. “It’s been fucking terrible, honestly.”

“It’s only been twenty-two minutes,” she looks up from her watch. “It’s our first session.” He sighs. “Rich,” she says, patient even though he wishes she wasn’t. “No one can make you feel better but yourself.”

Wrong, wrong, wrong. His brain - stuck on a loop. A needle in a groove, a record skipping. He knows what she means, in theory. But the reality of it just isn’t true. She’s wrong.

Eddie could.

“But,” he says, stops. Sighs.

“I don’t think I can,” he doesn’t say.

He worries at the cuff of his sleeve. There’s a thread that’s pulling. He rubs his thumb and finger together until the thread twists into a small ball. He’s always looking down at his hands, these days. He rips the loose thread. Everything snaps, given enough pressure. Enough tension, enough force. “I don’t know how.”

-

Eddie says, “Everyone’s here.”

Richie nods.

“Everyone but you.”

-

Winter comes and goes, always the same in LA anyway. Sometimes it rains, sometimes it’s warm. Nothing like the new memories he has behind his eyes, Maine at Christmas time. He remembers his mom’s shortbread. A half-foggy memory of him and Eddie, really young, maybe eight years old, in the kitchen of his parents’ house.

His mom had spent the morning baking batch after batch of cookies, and Richie and Eddie sat at the small table in the kitchen, covering them in icing. Covering each other in icing. Eddie was obsessed with Marie Antoinette's execution that year, he remembers.

It's a foggy memory, but in a normal way, Richie thinks. Not in the way of things being ripped away, erased, stolen, left with debris on Neibolt street.

“He was a weird kid,” Richie says. “A weird adult, mind you, but as a kid, I mean. Jesus. I was thinking about how he was obsessed, for a good year when we were like nine years old, with the guillotine.” Richie waves his hands around as he talks.

“He was a hypochondriac, but it’s like. When you’re a kid, you think quicksand or the Bermuda Triangle will be much bigger problems in adult life. I guess the hypochondriac version of that is political beheading.”

Richie is awake, knows he’s awake. The TV is on, not blaring but still loud. His laptop is on the coffee table, and the screen turning black as it falls asleep is what spurs Richie out of his daydream. Can remember his mom’s voice, teasing him about his thousand yard stare.

He looks away from his computer screen and there's Eddie. Across the room, his eyes are sunken bruises.

Richie doesn't breathe. Doesn't blink.

Bev says, "I'm glad you called," and her voice sounds sad. Happy and sad at the same time. God, Richie thinks. How little he deserves even this kindness.

"Yeah," he says. Then: "I'm so sad, Bev. I -" he chokes. Can't get the words out.

Blinks as his vision blurs behind his glasses. Takes them off one handed.

"I think all we can do is try the little things," she says.

"I don't know if I want to," he whispers. Wonders if she can even hear him.

"I think," she says. Stops. Starts again. "I think maybe it's all worth it just to see if you can. Make it through, I mean."

Richie walks in the front door of his apartment, tucks his keys back into his jeans.

He's tired. He pulls his phone from his back pocket.

Six unread messages, all in the group chat with Ben, Bill, Mike and Bev. Richie doesn't open it. They're all just sharing their flight information, he knows. Holds down the button on the side of his phone until the screen turns black.

He's so tired.

Behind the mirror in his bathroom, there's a line of orange-tinted bottles. He finds the one he wants, tosses two pills into his mouth. Runs the tap until it's as cold as it gets, cups his hands under it and drinks a handful of water.

Richie watches his own reflection in the mirror as he brushes his teeth.

He's been out of Derry for all of twelve hours, but the memories haven't stopped. Not since they started. He remembers, at fifteen, brushing his teeth in front of the mirror at his parents' house. Eddie sitting on the side of the bathtub, brushing his teeth and humming along.

At fifteen, Richie used to make Eddie force him into brushing his teeth when they had sleepovers. Eddie would push and shove at him until Richie got up, all big sighs and rolling eyes.

He closes his eyes and imagines the way Eddie looked at fifteen, half way through puberty, struggling at home, fighting with his mom, but not really talking about it with anyone. Sometimes with Richie, when it was so late it was early, from the floor of Richie's room. He imagines Eddie climbing into his bed eventually, after Richie's fourth "I can't *hear you, Asshole*," even though he could, of course he could. There was nothing else to listen to. Even when Richie didn't remember him, Richie thinks he was always listening for Eddie.

Richie imagines brushing his teeth before bed is like dragging his body across a finish line. A small victory. A pathetic one, but he thinks there's success in habit. Success in persistence. Somehow, you keep going.

The mirror is dirty. Not smudged, but slightly dusty. There's spots of what look like old, dried toothpaste across the bottom.

He'll clean it tomorrow. He takes his glasses off, runs them under the tap. Remembers the way Eddie would take his glasses right off Richie's face and wipe them clean and then put them back. He'd do it like he was mad about it. Even in tenderness, Eddie was burning red-hot and sour.

He closes his eyes and doesn't think anything. Spits. Turns on the tap, runs his toothbrush under the water. Puts it back in his mouth.

Richie's knee is bouncing. He feels like he has acid reflux but in his whole body. Like his head is full of bees.

The door at the end of the hall opens gently. A woman pops her head out, like she's leaning around it. "Richard?"

Richie stands. "Rich, please. Or Richie."

She nods and he walks towards her. "Come on in," she says, steps back behind the door.

He follows her into the office, which is...nice, actually. The room isn't small but it's not big either, cozy in a way he's never figured out how to replicate. She has a couple plants, her PhD up on the wall. A blanket over a couch, two arm chairs facing each other across from it. By the window, a desk. Knick knacks on it. A frame facing the other way, a picture in it that he can't see. A life he can't even imagine.

"My name's Robyn," she says. "Although I guess you knew that. Would you like anything to drink?"

Richie knows the answer to that one, actually. A way to buy time, even if comedy and therapy are meant to be different. "Water would be good," he says. "Thanks."

He sits in the armchair furthest from the desk, wonders if she thinks anything about that. Maybe he should have taken the couch.

“Am I meant to sit on the couch?” He asks. “I - I’ve never done this before,” he says, too fast.

“You can sit wherever you’d like,” Robyn says. “No wrong choice.” She smiles at him, and it’s warm.

“It reminds me of Woody Allen,” he says. “I just - I hate him. I -” he stops. Meets her eye. Huffs out a breath. “Sorry.”

“No need.” She finally sits across from him, places a glass of water in front of him.

He nods in thanks, takes a small sip. It’s a small glass. Everyone office or meeting he’s ever been to has these small, dinky glasses. A memory slips through: a crystal glass Richie’s dad used to drink scotch from.

“So, Rich. First time in therapy.”

He nods. “Yeah.”

“There are some rules, okay?” He nods again. Listens. She talks about

confidentiality, billing, how she's legally unable to tell him what he should do. She talks about judgement free zones and safety and how there might sometimes be homework.

"I understand you work in comedy," she says. He nods. "I like to think I have a good sense of humour," she says, smiling a bit. "But I will call you out on it if I think you're using humour to deflect, okay?"

"Can I be honest about this?" He asks, not much of a segue but he's already using all his willpower to keep his knee from bouncing again. Robyn nods.

"I think I made a mistake coming here."

"It's only been twenty-two minutes," she looks up from her watch. "It's our first session." He sighs. "Rich," she says, patient even though he wishes she wasn't. "No one can make you feel better but yourself."

Wrong, wrong, wrong. His brain - stuck on a loop. A needle in a groove, a record skipping. He knows what she means, in theory. But the reality of it just isn't true. She's wrong.

Eddie could.

"It's not easy to start," she says. "But you have. Started."

He shifts back in his chair, then shifts forward again. Reaches for his

glass of water. Bites his lip.

“I’m gay,” he says. Before she can even react, he says, “and my best friend died.”

“Okay,” she says. “Thank you for telling me. Do you want to tell me about it?”

“Which part?”

She smiles, lifts her shoulders. “Either.”

“His name is Eddie. Was Eddie, I guess.”

“Do you want to tell me about Eddie?” She asks.

Richie sets his laptop down on the coffee table in front of him. He’s just finished his set. Start to finish, it’s just about an hour long. Long enough for a special. For a tour, if he wanted. Isn’t sure that he actually does. It’s rough, a draft, but it’s -

It’s his.

He needs to send it over to his agent. He can hear Eddie's voice - *I knew it!* Remembers the way his stomach got tight, knowing Eddie had seen his stand-up, even if the jokes weren't his own.

His laptop screen turns black as it falls asleep, and it spurs Richie out of his daydream. He remembers his mom's voice, teasing him about his thousand yard stare. The TV is on, not blaring but still loud.

He looks away from his computer screen and there's Eddie. Across the room, his eyes are sunken bruises.

Richie doesn't breathe. Doesn't blink.

Eddie blinks. His eyes crinkle a bit, like he's just thought of something funny.

"I- Richie says. Stops. His heart is pounding in his chest so hard it hurts.

"I loved him," he tells Robyn during their fourth session. "Like. In a gay way."

"I can tell you miss him very much," she says.

He nods. “I’m afraid of--” He knows he’ll never be able to explain. Not really. How could he? He’d be committed. How would he even start? *So there’s this clown, right? But he’s like...a supernatural alien evil demon, okay?*

“I don’t want to forget about him,” he says.

“Grief takes all kinds of shapes,” she says, and he’s sure she’s right, but it doesn’t feel like it’s the same thing. Richie’s grief is huge, all encompassing. It’s the only thing he feels and he doesn’t really feel anything anymore, these days. He’s fucking sad, he’s so lonely. It was like when he didn’t remember Eddie, he was lonely, but it was okay. Fish don’t know they’re in water.

Now, Richie’s sadness is like Mariana’s fucking Trench, deep as shit, cold and dark with fucked up fish down there, probably. His grief is bigger, scarier. “I think fading love is probably the darkest kind,” he says, not even really knowing what he means.

He shakes his head. “Sometimes I think I see him, y’know? Like when I’m in the line at Trader Joe’s or sitting in booth in a bar. And each time, it’s like - fuck, will it ever go away? And what if it doesn’t? And do I even want it to?”

When he’s writing, he thinks about Eddie. About how everyone alive has lost someone or something they thought they couldn’t live

without. How Richie is still learning how to live with that loss.

But then he thinks, no, there's no one on earth who has ever known a love like this, a loss like this. He wants to talk about it but isn't sure how to start - how could he talk about Eddie in any kind of way that did him justice?

“Closure is a greasy little word,” Richie says. “And worse, it describes a non-fucking-existent condition.”

The truth is, nobody gets over anything.

He can hear Eddie's voice - *I knew it!* Remembers the way his stomach got tight, knowing Eddie had seen his stand-up, even if the jokes weren't his own.

His laptop screen turns black as it falls asleep, and it spurs Richie out of his daydream. He remembers his mom's voice, teasing him about his thousand yard stare. The TV is on, not blaring but still loud.

He looks away from his computer screen and there's Eddie. Across the room, his eyes are sunken bruises.

Richie doesn't breathe. Doesn't blink.

Eddie blinks. His eyes crinkle a bit, like he's just thought of something funny.

"I- Richie says. Stops. His heart is pounding in his chest so hard it hurts.

"I miss you," Richie says, eyes welling with tears. God.

Across the room, Eddie blinks. Raises his eyebrow.

"I love you," Richie says. Can feel a tear fall from his eye. "Always have."

Eddie smiles.

"Eds," Richie says. It makes his heart feel so full to remember how things used to be, how much things change. Nothing stays the same for long. "Always will."

When he blinks, Eddie is gone.

“I’ve been writing,” Richie says, practicing the vulnerability Robyn’s been talking to him about. It’s meant to nurture trust. He’s been on the phone call with them all for nearly thirty minutes, so he’s had time to muster the courage.

“And?” Ben asks.

“I think it’s good,” Richie says, smiling into it. “Or, well. It’s not bad.”

“What’s it about?” Bill asks.

“Eddie,” Richie says. “Coming out of the closet. Quicksand. I’ll send you guys tickets if you uh, want to come.”

There’s a course of “of course we’re coming” and “dumb-ass.”

Richie remembers when he really understood what his gayness meant. How scary it felt.

He says, “I remember being scared about stuff before that,” and Robyn makes some kind of note in her moleskin. “But it’s a wholly different experience to feel like you are sitting inside yourself,

looking out of your own eyes and trying not to cringe every time a person looks your way. Trying not to flinch when a person walks in your direction.”

“You’ve mentioned the small-mindedness of where you grew up before.”

“Yeah,” Richie says.

“Do you remember it ever going away?”

He shakes his head no. “I think I went so far into the closet that I came out the other side.” It should be almost funny, but it falls flat. Too raw.

Richie walks in the front door of his apartment, tucks his keys back into his jeans.

He’s tired. He pulls his phone from his back pocket. A message from his agent. He ignores it. Holds down the button on the side of his phone until the screen turns black.

He’s so tired.

Behind the mirror in his bathroom, there's a line of orange-tinted bottles. He finds the one he wants, tosses two pills into his mouth. Runs the tap until it's as cold as it gets, cups his hands under it and drinks a handful of water.

He remembers, at fifteen, brushing his teeth in front of the mirror at his parents' house. Eddie sitting on the side of the bathtub, brushing his teeth and humming along. Remembers, that winter, Eddie going through a phase where he listened to Cyndi Lauper unironically, but wouldn't admit that.

He lets the memory pass over him. Remembers that whole year standing stock still at his bathroom sink. Remembers teaching Eddie to drive while his mom and dad were asleep. Remembers the way Eddie would tap out a tune on the steering wheel, the car in park in Richie's drive way. He can hear Eddie laugh, can hear Eddie sigh. Remembers how Eddie rolled his eyes with his whole face. Remembers that was the last summer he really had freckles.

He opens his eyes and there on the lip of the tub is Eddie, fully grown, elbows resting in his knees.

Richie exhales, once, heavy. "What was that song you sang that summer?" He asks.

"When You Were Mine," Eddie says, lips curling up at the corners of his mouth.

"Right," Richie said. He smiles.

“What?” Eddie asks, and Richie’s smile widens in the middle of his mental break.

“It’s nothing.” He laughs at the face this half-baked memory of Eddie makes. Richie wants to hold onto him so desperately. “It’s nothing - it’s just... nice. It’s a nice thing to remember.“

*I've kept the plant alive,* Richie sends, and a few minutes later gets a :) in return. Then, his phone rings in his hand.

“Beverlee,” he says, smiling.

“I’ve only been gone a week, Rich, I sure to shit hope you’ve kept it alive.”

Richie laughs. “What’s up?”

“Not much,” she says. “Just missed you. Figured I’d call. See what you’re up to.”

“Rehearsing,” he says. “I’ll be seeing you guys in under a week. Think I can keep it together ‘til then.”

“Hmm,” she says. “Hopefully.”

“Oh fuck you, Marsh,” he says, biting back on his smile.

“How was your visit with your friends?” Robyn asks and Richie really means it when he says, “Really nice.”

She nods, so he continues, used to this part now. “Bev and Ben brought me a tomato plant to take care of.”

“Do you like tomatoes?”

“Not particularly,” Richie says. “Texture thing.” She smiles. “But I like taking care of it.”

“And did you do the homework from our last session?” He nods, pulls his phone out.

“Notes are in my phone,” he says.

“I’d love to hear some,” she says.

Richie swallows.

“Yeah, I uh. Yes. Tuesday, four out of ten. Made it out of bed and made a cup of tea but didn’t do much else. Didn’t drink anything, though, which earned a four. Showered and ate a bowl of cereal.

“Wednesday, seven out of ten. Met with my agent and got tickets for my show set aside for my friends. Booked my flights and picked a hotel. Fell asleep on the couch without taking any Ambien.”

“Thanks for sharing with me, Rich, Robyn says.

“Yeah,” Richie says, closing his phone and lifting his hips to slide it back into his pocket. He sighs, turns to face the window.

“It’s okay if your grief looks different from day to day.”

“Hmm,” Richie says. Remembers his mom’s voice, teasing him about his thousand yard stare. Remembers Eddie’s fingers on the steering wheel of his dad’s car.

“It’s okay to miss him,” Robyn says, and it spurs Riche from his daydream. He imagines Eddie, across the coffee table from them, laying across Robyn’s couch. Wonders what he’d say to her, if the roles were reversed.

“I always will,” Richie says, and it feels sad as he says it. “It’s just -

how things are. I'll always miss him." It's just the truth, in the truest sense of it. How the universe works. Tomato plants won't grow in the shade. Ivy needs something to cling to. "I'll always love him."

Richie's knee is bouncing. He feels like he has acid reflux but in his whole body. Like his head is full of bees.

His uber drops him part way up the block. He slips back and up the alley and in the back door of Laugh Factory.

There are people working on the sound system, headsets on. He's got plenty of time. He slips behind a door with his name on it. Closes it behind him.

Sitting in front of the mirror, not ten feet away, Eddie.

Richie sighs, leans back against the closed door behind him. Tips his chin up until his head hits it. Rests it there. Rubs his hand over his eyes.

"Eds," he says.

"You're going on soon," the Eddie in Richie's head says. "Sit for a while," the Eddie in Richie's dressing room says.

“Yeah,” Richie says. “I’ve got time.”

Richie crosses the room, watches Eddie’s ghost track his reflection in the mirror. Sits on the small couch at the back of the room. Eddie gets up and moves across the room, so slowly it’s like he’s really there. So softly that he couldn’t be.

“Everyone’s here.”

Richie nods. “Everyone but you.”

“I’m here,” Eddie says. And Richie guesses he is. That he is wherever Richie is, so long as Richie’s the one imagining him.

Richie starts to cry, wipes a hand across his face. “Useless,” Eddie says. Then, “It’s okay.”

“It’s not,” Richie says. He shakes his head and shakes his head and whispers, “I don’t know what to do without you.” It ought to be a lie. Isn’t.

Eddie slips his hand into Richie’s and Richie could swear he really feels it. Knots their fingers together. “Sure you do,” Eddie says, and Richie looks at the side of his face.

“Break a leg,” Eddie says, then snorts, face cracking open with the laugh. “Break two legs.”

Richie wipes his hand over his eyes. “Fuck you, man,” he says, laughing through a sob.

“You’ll be great,” Eddie says.

“I miss you,” Richie says. “So much.” More than he ever thought was possible.

Richie steps out into the lights, heart hammering. There are cheers, hoots and hollers and clapping and he smiles, waves. Gets to the mic stand and does a little curtsey.

“Thank you,” he says, bowing his head. “Thanks, Chicago. Hello.”

Just like therapy, there are rules for comedy. Pause for laughter. He remembers Robyn placing his very first glass of water in front of him.

Uncorks the bottle of water on the stool beside him, sips.

“Thank you very much for coming out tonight. You are all very lucky.” Some small chuckles. “I haven’t been to Chicago for some time. Won’t be touring this show for some time, if at all. So. You all count your lucky stars that you’re here.

“Some friends of mine are here.” To Richie’s left, a collect woop and cheering. “They’re old friends,” he says. “Like..really old. Which is a weird thing to say, since it means I’m really old now.

“We grew up together, the group of us. I hadn’t seen them in ages, and now they’re here. It’s all very special for me personally.

“This show is going to be different than my work in the past for a few reasons. One, I will talk about my dick significantly less than normal.” Laughs. “I’ll still talk about my dick, don’t worry.” A hoot. “But I uh -” He breathes in deeply through his nose, out heavily through his mouth. “I’ve been going through some things, you could say.”

He takes another sip from his bottled water. Wishes he’d taken the beer some venue manager had offered him before.

“So,” Richie says, palms sweating. He smiles, barely, tight lipped, there and gone. “A good friend of mine died a few months ago.”

He closes the fingers of list left hand into a fist. Wants to cry. Keeps his eyes open. “It’s been, uh.” He shrugs. “It’s been fucking terrible, honestly.” Another sip. “It’s made me work on a lot of stuff, which is part of the reason why I made the terrible choice to say no to a beer and instead took this bottle of fucking Costco water before this show.

Amateur shit.” Some chuckles.

“His name was Eddie,” Richie says, and it’s like a brick comes off his chest. “He was a weird kid,” Richie says. “A weird adult, mind you, but as a kid, I mean. Jesus. I was thinking about how he was obsessed, for a good year when we were like nine years old, with the guillotine.” Richie waves his hands around as he talks.

“He was a hypochondriac, but it’s like. When you’re a kid, you think quicksand or the Bermuda Triangle will be much bigger problems in adult life. I guess the hypochondriac version of that is political beheading.

“Anyway,” Richie says. “Grief is a weird thing. Twisted and lonely and scary. Helped me watch a *lot* of bad Netflix movies. So, thank you, Vanessa Hudgens, I owe you one.”

Break a leg,” Eddie says, then snorts, face cracking open with the laugh. “Break two legs.”

Richie wipes his hand over his eyes. “Fuck you, man,” he says, laughing through a sob.

“You’ll be great,” Eddie says.

“I miss you,” Richie says. “So much.” More than he ever thought was possible.

Eddie nods. “I know.” He strokes Richie’s cheek - and how cruel for softest thing Richie’s ever felt be something imagined, something mixed up, broken, something that could never really be.

“Closure is a greasy little word,” Richie says. “And worse, it describes a non-fucking-existent condition.”

The truth is, nobody gets over anything.

“It’s so hard,” Richie says. “It’s so fucking-”

“Hey,” Eddie says. “You’re going to be okay, Richie.”

“Doesn’t feel like it,” he says. “Why did I even write this stupid sho-”

“You know why,” Eddie says, smiling. “It’s for me.”

Richie looks at the door. “Yeah.”

“So go share it for me.”

“What if I can’t?”

“Course you can, man, this is nothing. We’ve seen way worse.”

Richie laughs. Closes his eyes. “I love you, Eddie. I always, always have.”

“I know,” Eddie says, and when Richie opens his eyes, he’s alone. He can still feel Eddie squeezing his hand.

There’s a knock at the door.

“Mr. Tozier?” A tech opens the door. “We’re twenty minutes out. Do you need anything?”

“No thanks,” he says, and the tech closes the door. Richie stands in front of the mirror and looks at his own reflection.

“Break a leg,” he says to himself.

Behind him, in his mind’s eye, Eddie smiles. “Break two.”

